SIGRDRIFUMOL

The Ballad of The Victory-Bringer

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The so-called *Sigrdrifumol*, which immediately follows the *Fafnismol* in the *Codex Regius* without any indication of a break, and without separate title, is unquestionably the most chaotic of all the poems in the Eddic collection. The end of it has been entirely lost, for the fifth folio of eight sheets is missing from *Regius*, the gap coming after the first line of stanza 29 of this poem. That stanza has been completed, and eight more have been added, from much later paper manuscripts, but even so the conclusion of the poem is in obscurity.

Properly speaking, however, the strange conglomeration of stanzas which the compiler of the collection has left for us, and which, in much the same general form, seems to have lain before the authors of the *Volsungasaga*, in which eighteen of its stanzas are quoted, is not a poem at all. Even its customary title is an absurd error. The mistake made by the annotator in thinking that the epithet "sigrdrifa," rightly applied to Brynhild as a "bringer of victory," was a proper name has already been explained and commented on (note on *Fafnismol*, 44). Even if the collection of stanzas were in any real sense a poem, which it emphatically is not, it is certainly not the "Ballad of Sigrdrifa" which it is commonly called. "Ballad of Brynhild" would be a sufficiently suitable title, and I have here brought the established name "Sigrdrifumol" into accord with this by translating the epithet instead of treating it as a proper name.

Even apart from the title, however, the *Sigrdrifumol* has little claim to be regarded as a distinct poem, nor is there any indication that the compiler did so regard it. Handicapped as we are by the loss of the concluding section, and of the material which followed it on those missing pages, we can yet see that the process which began with the prose *Fra Dautha Sinfjotla*, and which, interrupted by the insertion of the *Gripisspo*, went on through the *Reginsmol* and the *Fafnismol*, continued through as much of the *Sigrdrifumol* as is left to us. In other words, the compiler told the story of Sigurth in mixed prose and verse, using whatever verse he could find without much questioning as to its origin, and filling in the gaps with hii own prose. *Fra*

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Dautha Sinfjotla, *Reginsmol*, *Fafnismol*, and *Sigrdrifumol* are essentially a coherent unit, but one of the compiler's making only; they represent neither one poem nor three distinct poems, and the divisions and titles which have been almost universally adopted by editors are both arbitrary and misleading.

The *Sigrdrifumol* section as we now have it is an extraordinary piece of patchwork. It is most unlikely that the compiler himself brought all these fragments together for the first

time; little by little, through a process of accretion and also, unluckily, through one of elimination, the material grew into its present shape. Certainly the basis of it is a poem dealing with the finding of Brynhild by Sigurth, but of this original poem only five stanzas (2-4 and 20-21) can be identified with any degree of confidence. To these five stanzas should probably, however, be added some, if not all, of the passage (stanzas 6-12) in which Brynhild teaches Sigurth the magic runes. These stanzas of rune-lore attracted sundry similar passages from other sources, including stanza 5, in which a magic draught is administered (not necessarily by Brynhild or to Sigurth), the curious rune-chant in stanzas 15-17, and stanzas 13-14 and 18-19. Beginning with stanza 22, and running to the end of the fragment (stanza 37), is a set of numbered counsels closely resembling the *Loddfafnismol* (*Hovamol*, stanzas 111-138), which manifestly has nothing whatever to do with Brynhild. Even in this passage there are probably interpolations (stanzas 25, 27, 30, 54, and 36). Finally, and bespeaking the existence at some earlier time of another Sigurth-Brynhild poem, is stanza 1, sharply distinguished by its metrical form from stanzas 2-4 and 20-21. Many critics argue that stanzas 6-10 of *Helreith Brynildar* belonged originally to the same poem as stanza 1 of the *Sigrdrifumol*.

The *Sigrdrifumol*, then, must be regarded simply as a collection of fragments, most of them originally having no relation to the main subject. All of the story, the dialogue and the characterization are embodied in stanzas 1-4 and 20-21 and in the prose notes accompanying the first four stanzas; all of the rest might equally well (or better) be transferred to the *Hovamol*, where its character entitles it to a place. Yet stanzas 2-4 are as fine as anything in Old Norse poetry, and it is out of the scanty material of these three stanzas that Wagner constructed much of the third act of "Siegfried."

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The *Sigrdrifumol* represents almost exclusively the contributions of the North to the Sigurth tradition (cf. introductory note to the *Gripisspo*). Brynhild, here disguised by the annotator as "Sigrdrifa," appears simply as a battle-maid and supernatural dispenser of wisdom; there is no trace of the daughter of Buthli and the rival of Guthrun. There is, however, so little of the "poem" which can definitely be assigned to the Sigurth cycle that it is impossible to trace back any of the underlying narrative substance.

The nature and condition of the material have made editorial conjectures and emendations very numerous, and as most of the guesses are neither conclusive nor particularly important, only a few of their are mentioned in the notes.

Sigurth rode up on Hindarfjoll and turned southward toward the land of the Franks. On the mountain he saw a great light, as if fire were burning, and the glow reached up to heaven. And when he came thither, there stood a tower of shields, and above it was a banner. Sigurth went into the shield-tower, and saw that a man lay there sleeping with all his war-weapons. First he took the helm from his head, and then he saw that it was a

woman. The mail-coat was as fast as if it had grown to the flesh. Then he cut the mail-coat from the

[*Prose*. The introductory prose follows without break the prose concluding the *Fafnismol*, the point of division being arbitrary and not agreed upon by all editors. *Hindarfjoll*: cf. *Fafnismol*, 42 and note. *Franks*: this does not necessarily mean that Sigurth was on his way to the Gjukungs' home, for Sigmund had a kingdom in the land of the Franks (cf. *Fra Dautha Sinfjotla*). *Shields*: the annotator probably drew the notion of the shield-tower from the reference in *Helreith Brynhildar*, 9. The flame-girt tower was not uncommon; cf. Mengloth's hall in *Svipdagsmol*.]

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head-opening downward, and out to both the arm-holes. Then he took the mail-coat from her, and she awoke, and sat up and saw Sigurth, and said:

1. "What bit through the byrnie? | how was broken my sleep?
Who made me free | of the fetters pale?"

He answered:
"Sigmund's son, | with Sigurth's sword,
That late with flesh | hath fed the ravens."

Sigurth sat beside her and asked her name. She took a horn full of mead and gave him a memory-draught.

2. "Hail, day! | Hail, sons of day!
And night and her daughter now!
Look on us here | with loving eyes,
That waiting we victory win.

[1. This stanza, and the two lines included in the prose after stanza 4, and possibly stanza 5 as well, evidently come from a different poem from stanzas 2-4. Lines 3-4 in the original are obscure, though the general meaning is clear.

Prose (after stanza 1). In the manuscript stanza 4 stands before this prose note and stanzas 2-3. The best arrangement of the stanzas seems to be the one here given, following Müllenhoff's suggestion, but the prose note is out of place anywhere. The first sentence of it ought to follow stanza 4 and immediately precede the next prose note; the second sentence ought to precede stanza 5.

2. *Sons of day*: the spirits of light. *The daughter of night* (Not), according to Snorri, was Jorth (Earth).]

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3. "Hail to the gods! | Ye goddesses, hail,
And all the generous earth!
Give to us wisdom | and goodly speech,
And healing hands, life-long.

4. "Long did I sleep, | my slumber was long,
And long are the griefs of life;
Othin decreed | that I could not break
The heavy spells of sleep."

Her name was Sigrdrifa, and she was a Valkyrie. She said that two kings fought in battle; one was called Hjalmgunnar, an old man but a mighty warrior, and Othin had promised him the victory, and

The other was Agnar, | brother of Autha,
None he found | who fain would shield him.

Sigrdrifa, slew Hjalmgunnar in the battle, and Othin pricked her with the sleep-thorn in punishment for this, and said that she should never thereafter win victory in battle, but that she should be wedded. "And I said to him that I had made a vow in my turn, that I would

[*Prose* (after stanza 4). *Sigrdrifa*: on the error whereby this epithet, "victory-bringer," became a proper name cf. *Fafnismol*, 44 and note. *Hjalmgunnar*: in *Helreith Brynhildar* (stanza 8) he is called a king of the Goths, which means little; of him and his adversary, *Agnar*, we know, nothing beyond what is told here. The two lines quoted apparently come from the same poem as stanza 1; the two first lines of the stanza have been reconstructed from the prose thus: "Hjalmgunnar was one, | the hoary king, / And triumph to him | had Heerfather promised." A few editions insert in this prose passage stanzas 7-10 of *Helreith Brynhildar*, which may or may not have be longed originally to this poem.]

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never marry a man who knew the meaning of fear." Sigurth answered and asked her to teach him wisdom, if she knew of what took place in all the worlds. Sigrdrifa said:

5. "Beer I bring thee, | tree of battle,
Mingled of strength | and mighty fame;
Charms it holds | and healing signs,
Spells full good, | and gladness-runes."

* * * * * *

6. Winning-runes learn, | if thou longest to win,
And the runes on thy sword-hilt write;
Some on the furrow, | and some on the flat,
And twice shalt thou call on Tyr.

7. Ale-runes learn, | that with lies the wife
Of another betray not thy trust;

[5. This stanza is perhaps, but by no means surely, from the same poem as stanza 1. *Tree of battle*: warrior. *Runes*: the earliest runes were not letters, but simply signs supposed to possess magic power; out of them developed the "runic alphabet."

6. Stanzas 6-12 give a list of runes which probably had no original connection with the Brynhild-Sigurth story. *Tyr*: the sword-god (cf. Hymiskvitha, 4 and note); "tyr" is also the name of a rune which became "T."

7. *Regius* gives only lines 1-6; lines 7-8 are added from *Volsungasaga*. *Lies*, etc.: a guest on his arrival received a draught of ale from the hands of his host's wife, and it was to prevent this draught from bewitching him that the runes were recommended. *Need*: the word "nauth," meaning "need," is also the name of the rune which became "N." *Leek*: leeks were long supposed to have the power of counteracting poison or witchcraft.]

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On the horn thou shalt write, | and the backs of thy hands,
And Need shalt mark on thy nails.
Thou shalt bless the draught, | and danger escape,
And cast a leek in the cup;
(For so I know | thou never shalt see
Thy mead with evil mixed.)

8. Birth-runes learn, | if help thou wilt lend,
The babe from the mother to bring;
On thy palms shalt write them, | and round thy joints,
And ask the fates to aid.

9. Wave-runes learn, | if well thou wouldst shelter
The sail-steeds out on the sea;
On the stem shalt thou write, | and the steering blade,
And burn them into the oars;
Though high be the breakers, | and black the waves,
Thou shalt safe the harbor seek.

10. Branch-runes learn, | if a healer wouldst be,
And cure for wounds wouldst work;

[9. *Sail-steeds*: ships.

10. *Branch-runes*: runes cut in the bark of trees. Such runes were believed to transfer sickness from the invalid to the tree. Some editors, however, have changed "limrunar" ("branch runes") to "lifrunar" ("life-runes").]

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On the bark shalt thou write, | and on trees that be
With boughs to the eastward bent.

11. Speech-runes learn, | that none may seek
To answer harm with hate;
Well he winds | and weaves them all,
And sets them side by side,

At the judgment-place, | when justice there
The folk shall fairly win.

12. Thought-runes learn, | if all shall think
Thou art keenest minded of men.

* * * * * *

13. Them Hropt arranged, | and them he wrote,
And them in thought he made,

[11. Lines 3-6 look like an accidental addition, replacing two lines now lost. They mean, apparently, that the man who interweaves his speech with "speech-runes" when he pleads his case at the "Thing," or popular tribunal, will not unduly enrage his adversary in the argument of the case.

12. Here the list of runes breaks off, though the manuscript indicates no gap, and three short passages of a different type, though all dealing with runes, follow.

13. Stanzas 13-14 appear to have come from a passage regarding Othin's getting of the runes similar to *Hovamol*, 139-146. Editors have tried various combinations of the lines in stanzas 12-14. *Hropt*: Othin; cf. *Voluspo*, 62. *The draught*, etc.: apparently the reference is to the head of Mim, from which Othin derived his wisdom in magic (cf. *Voluspo*, 47 and note); *Heithdraupnir* ("Light-Dropper") and *Hoddrofnir* ("Treasure-Opener") seem to be names for Mim.]

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Out of the draught | that down had dropped
From the head of Heithdraupnir,
And the horn of Hoddrofnir.

14. On the mountain he stood | with Brimir's sword,
On his head the helm he bore;
Then first the head | of Mim spoke forth,
And words of truth it told.

* * * * * *

15. He bade write on the shield | before the shining goddess,
On Arvak's ear, | and on Alsvith's hoof,
On the wheel of the car | of Hrungnir's killer,
On Sleipnir's teeth, | and the straps of the sledge.

16. On the paws of the bear, | and on Bragi's tongue,

[14. This stanza is clearly in bad shape; perhaps, as the manuscript indicates, a new stanza, of which most has been lost, should begin with line 3. *Brimir*: a giant (cf. *Voluspo*, 9 and 37); why Othin should have his sword is unknown.

15. Stanzas 15-17 constitute a wholly distinct rune-chant. Line 1 is unusually long in the original, as here. *Shield*: the shield Svalin ("Cooling") that stands in front of the sun; cf. *Grimnismol*, 38. *Arvak* ("Early Waker"') and *Alsvith* ("All Swift"): the horses that draw the sun's car; cf. *Grimnismol*, 37, *Hrungnir*: the slayer of the giant Hrungnir was Thor (cf. *Harbarthsljoth*, 14 and note), but the line is in bad shape; the name may not be Hrungnir, and "killer" is 2 conjectural addition. *Sleipnir*: Othin's eight-legged horse; cf. *Grimnismol*, 44 and note. *Sledge*: perhaps the one mentioned in *Grimnismol*, 49- 16. Bragi: the god of poetry; cf. *Grimnismol*, 44 and note.]

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On the wolf's claws bared, | and the eagle's beak,
On bloody wings, | and bridge's end,
On freeing hands | and helping foot-prints.

17. On glass and on gold, | and on goodly charms,
In wine and in beer, | and on well-loved seats,
On Gungnir's point, | and on Grani's breast,
On the nails of Norns, | and the night-owl's beak.

* * * * * *

18. Shaved off were the runes | that of old were written,
And mixed with the holy mead,
And sent on ways so wide;
So the gods had them, | so the elves got them,
And some for the Wanes so wise,
And some for mortal men.

19. Beech-runes are there, | birth-runes are there,
And all the runes of ale,

[17. *Charms*: the wearing of amulets was very common. *Gungnir*: Othin's spear, made by the dwarfs, which he occasionally lent to heroes to whom he granted victory. *Grani*: Sigurth's horse; the *Volsungasaga* has "giantesses'."

19. Stanzas 18-19, which editors have freely rearranged, apparently come from another source than any of the rest. *Shaved off*: the runes were shaved off by Othin from the wood on which they were carved, and the shavings bearing them were put into the magic mead. *Wanes*: cf. *Voluspo*, 21, note.

19. Lines 3, 6, and 7 look like spurious additions, but the whole stanza is chaotic. *Beech-runes*: runes carved on beech trees.]

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And the magic runes of might;
Who knows them rightly | and reads them true,
Has them himself to help;
Ever they aid,
Till the gods are gone.

* * * * * *

Brynhild spake:
20. "Now shalt thou choose, | for the choice is given,
Thou tree of the biting blade;
Speech or silence, | 'tis thine to say,
Our evil is destined all."

Sigurth spake:
21. "I shall not flee, | though my fate be near,
I was born not a coward to be;

[20. Stanzas 20-21 are all that remains of the dialogue between Brynhild and Sigurth from the poem to which stanzas 2-4 belong; cf. Introductory Note. In the intervening lost stanzas Brynhild has evidently warned Sigurth of the perils that will follow if he swears loyalty to her; hence the choice to which she here refers. *Tree*, etc.: warrior. The manuscript does not indicate the speaker of either this or the following stanza; the *Volsungasaga* names Sigurth before stanza 21.

21. It is quite possible that the original poem concluded with two stanzas after this, paraphrased thus in the *Volsungasaga*: "Sigurth said: 'Nowhere is to be found any one wiser than thou, and this I swear, that I shall have thee for mine, and that thou art after my heart's desire.' She answered: 'I would rather have thee though I might choose among all men.' And this they bound between them with oaths." Stanzas 22-37, which the *Volsungasaga* paraphrases, may have been introduced at a relatively early time, but can hardly have formed part of the original poem.]

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Thy loving word | for mine will I win,
As long as I shall live."

22. Then first I rede thee, | that free of guilt
Toward kinsmen ever thou art;
No vengeance have, | though they work thee harm,
Reward after death thou shalt win.

23. Then second I rede thee, | to swear no oath
If true thou knowest it not;
Bitter the fate | of the breaker of troth,
And poor is the wolf of his word.

24. Then third I rede thee, | that thou at the Thing
Shalt fight not in words with fools;
For the man unwise | a worser word
Than he thinks doth utter oft.

25. Ill it is | if silent thou art,
A coward born men call thee,
And truth mayhap they tell;

[22. With this stanza begins the list of numbered counsels, closely resembling the *Loddfafnismol* (*Hovamol*, 111-138), here attributed to Brynhild. That the section originally had anything to do with Brynhild is more than improbable.

23. *Wolf of his word*: oath-destroyer, oath-breaker.

25. This chaotic and obscure jumble of lines has been unsuccessfully "improved" by various editors. It is clearly an interpolation, meaning, in substance: "It is dangerous to keep silent too long, as men may think you a coward; but if any one taunts {footnote p. 398} you falsely because of your silence, do not argue with him, but the next morning kill him as proof that he is a liar."]

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Seldom safe is fame,
Unless wide renown be won;
On the day thereafter | send him to death,
Let him pay the price of his lies.

26. Then fourth I rede thee, | if thou shalt find
A wily witch on thy road,
It is better to go | than her guest to be,
Though night enfold thee fast.

27. Eyes that see | need the sons of men
Who fight in battle fierce;
Oft witches evil | sit by the way,
Who blade and courage blunt.

28. Then fifth I rede thee, | though maidens fair
Thou seest on benches sitting,
Let the silver of kinship | not rob thee of sleep,
And the kissing of women beware.

29. Then sixth I rede thee, | if men shall wrangle,
And ale-talk rise to wrath,
No words with a drunken | warrior have,
For wine steals many men's wits.

[27. Probably another interpolation.

28. *Silver of kinship*: the passage is doubtful, but apparently it means the "marriage-price" for which a bride was "bought."

29. Line 1 comes at the end of the thirty-second leaf of *Regius*, and whatever further was contained in that manuscript has vanished {footnote p. 399} with the lost eight-leaf folio (cf. Introductory Note). The rest of stanza 29, and stanzas 50-37, are added from later paper manuscripts, which were undoubtedly copied from an old parchment, though probably not from the complete *Regius*. The *Volsungasaga* paraphrases these additional stanzas.]

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30. Brawls and ale | full oft have been
An ill to many a man,
Death for some, | and sorrow for some;
Full many the woes of men.

31. Then seventh I rede thee, | if battle thou seekest
With a foe that is full of might;
It is better to fight | than to burn alive
In the hall of the hero rich.

32. Then eighth I rede thee, | that evil thou shun,
And beware of lying words;
Take not a maid, | nor the wife of a man,
Nor lure them on to lust.

33. Then ninth I rede thee: | burial render
If thou findest a fallen corpse,
Of sickness dead, | or dead in the sea,
Or dead of weapons' wounds.

34. A bath shalt thou give them | who corpses be,

[30. Probably an interpolation.

31. The meaning is that it is better to go forth to battle than to stay at home and be burned to death. Many a Norse warrior met his death in this latter way; the burning of the house in the *Njalssaga* is the most famous instance.

34. Probably an interpolation.]

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And hands and head shalt wash;
Wipe them and comb, | ere they go in the coffin,
And pray that they sleep in peace.

35. Then tenth I rede thee, | that never thou trust
The word of the race of wolves,
(If his brother thou broughtest to death,
Or his father thou didst fell;)
Often a wolf | in a son there is,
Though gold he gladly takes.

36. Battle and hate | and harm, methinks,
Full seldom fall asleep;

Wits and weapons | the warrior needs
If boldest of men he would be.

37. Then eleventh I rede thee, | that wrath thou shun,
And treachery false with thy friends;
Not long the leader's | life shall be,
For great are the foes he faces.

[35. Lines 3-4 are probably interpolated. *Race of wolves*: family of a slain foe.

36. Probably an interpolation.

37. Lines 3-4 may well have come from the old Sigurth-Brynhild poem, like stanzas 2-4 and 20-21, being inserted here, where they do not fit particularly well, in place of the two lines with which the eleventh counsel originally ended. Perhaps they formed part of the stanza of warning which evidently preceded Brynhild's speech in stanza 20. In the *Volsungasaga* they are paraphrased at the end of Brynhild's long speech of advice (stanzas 20-37), and are immediately followed by the prose passage given in the note on stanza 21. It seems likely, therefore, {footnote p. 401} that the paper manuscripts have preserved all of the so-called *Sigrdrifumol* which was contained in the lost section of *Regius*, with the possible exception of these two concluding stanzas, and these may very well have been given only in the form of a prose note, though it is practically certain that at one time they existed in verse form.]

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